

# Representative Skip Priest

## 2005 Session Report



Dear Friends,

The 2005 legislative session has come to a close. The people of Washington had some wins this year, including legislation that could be a real help to high school students who want to pursue a career in the trades or a technical field. On the other hand, it was a very expensive session, with nearly a half-billion dollars in new state budget taxes and \$8.5 billion in new gas taxes. **I voted against both.**

I am very grateful for the hundreds of you who took the time to complete my recent district survey. As you will see in this newsletter, your views played a direct role in the issues we faced in Olympia and how I voted on bills. See the "State's Pocketbook" section for an example of how I represented you this year. If you wish to see the full survey results, please check my website at <http://hrc.leg.wa.gov/members/priest>.

Finally, I enjoyed seeing those of you who **came to Olympia to visit** during the session. I hope you will continue to stay in touch over the summer and fall. You will see me out around the district often, and can **contact me anytime** via my Olympia office at (360) 786-7830. Thank you for the honor of representing you in Olympia again this year.

Warmest regards,

Rep. Skip Priest

### 30th District

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#### Committees:

Judiciary, Ranking Republican  
Appropriations  
Higher Education

#### Web Site:

<http://hrc.leg.wa.gov/members/priest>

#### Toll-free Legislative Hotline:

1-800-562-6000

#### Hearing-impaired Hotline:

1-800-635-9993

### How our office can help you

Having difficulty working with a state agency, getting a business license, bidding on state projects or another state-related issue? Our office can help – or we can point you in the right direction.

If you would like me to come and **speak at your child's school** or to **another group** about the Legislature, please give our office a call. We'd be happy to arrange it. We also send out occasional e-mail updates on matters before the Legislature. If you would like to receive those, please send us your e-mail address.

# Rep. Skip Priest

## Transportation

This year lawmakers voted on a **9.5 cent gas tax increase** to pay for a package of transportation projects. **I voted against this tax increase.** I believe it is important to take a long-term view of transportation, and understand that some of our major highways are very old and traffic congestion is a problem — especially in Puget Sound. But this was a package I just **could not vote for**. While it does contain some funding for projects in our district, like the Triangle project, I still felt we would be paying too much for what our district received in return.

Frankly the project list is very Seattle-centric, and yet provides only a portion of the money needed to replace the Alaskan Way Viaduct and 520 floating bridge. To make up the rest, King County voters — including us here in South King County — will



have to **tax ourselves billions more** to pay for these Seattle projects. Many of those projects don't even yet have a price tag and community leaders haven't figured out how to build them.

Yet the state has already provided the funding? That seems backward to me.

The 9.5 cent gas tax increase — the largest in state history — is just **too much, too soon**. When lawmakers passed the nickel gas tax increase in 2003, it was for clearly identified and funded projects, included efficiencies, and was accompanied by a no-new-taxes general fund budget. None of those elements were present this time around. In fact, we have yet to see all the promised accomplishments from the nickel package. Passing a 9.5 cent increase now is just too soon after the nickel package.

In the end, I believed that folks in our district would be paying too much for too little in return, and that's why I voted against it.

## The state's pocketbook

In mid-March we learned that Washington has nearly **\$2 billion more in revenue** available this biennium. That could have set the stage for a **no-new-taxes budget**. Many of you who responded to my district survey shared that belief. Unfortunately, the final budget spends more money than the state has available. I voted against the budget because it:

- Raises state spending by 12 percent — the largest jump in 14 years;
- Reinstates the estate tax;
- Increases the cigarette tax by 60 cents a pack and liquor tax by \$1 a liter;
- Pulls \$233 million from one-time funding sources and dedicated accounts, including the fund that provides medical services for low-income children;

- Puts off making payments to the state pension fund, resulting in hundreds of millions in additional future payments; and
- Leaves less than one percent in reserve.

One major disappointment is that this budget completely abandons the **Priorities of Government (POG)** process we followed successfully two years ago. When we identified the services people want most and funded those first, we filled a \$2.7 billion budget gap with no new taxes. Unfortunately, this year the Legislature tossed out the POG process and raised taxes on specific groups to fund its wish list, such as smokers, drinkers and those who own small businesses, property or other assets worth more than \$1.5 million.

Singling out certain taxpayers to foot the bill was the easiest way to raise taxes. But it isn't necessarily the best way. The budget tricks used this year set us up for a \$1 billion budget shortfall next budget cycle. That means anyone who wasn't targeted this time could certainly be on the tax list next time. In addition, budget-writers did not examine how the state delivers programs, nor find ways to get more money into the safety net and less into meeting government regulations.

This is not the way to build a sustainable budget — one that will fund education and other critical needs long into the future. That is why I **voted against it**. Next session, as the Legislature considers a mid-biennium budget, I will continue to support a fiscally responsible spending plan that will sustain our state for the long-term.

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## Legislation that affects you

### WASL Alternative



This year I introduced legislation, signed into law in May, to provide high school students with an alternative to meeting the WASL graduation requirement. Many students know in high

school they want to pursue a career in the **trades or a specific technical field**. Yet they're required to pursue the same course of study and take the same WASL test as kids going on to a four-year or community college. Two thirds of respondents to my district survey said they would support the idea of giving students who want to go this route an equivalent alternative to meeting the WASL graduation requirement.

House Bill 1987 directs the state Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to study the feasibility of creating a rigorous WASL graduation requirement for students who want to pursue a career in the trades or a technical field. Over the summer and fall, the OSPI will **compare differences and similarities** between students involved in the

regular high school course of study and those enrolled in career and technical (CTE) programs that lead to national or state industry certification. The OSPI will then determine if CTE students' studies are comparable in rigor to the reading, writing, mathematics and science courses taken by students preparing for the WASL and decide whether the CTE courses, when complete, can be used as WASL alternatives.

Thanks to **Tom Murphy, Karen Dickinson and Nancy Hawkins** from the Federal Way School District and **Charles Hoff** from the School Board who came to Olympia to speak in support of the bill. I will continue to pursue making this course of study a reality for our kids.



*Rep. Priest with Gov. Gregoire, Tom Murphy, Terry Bergeson and others as HB 1987 is signed into law.*

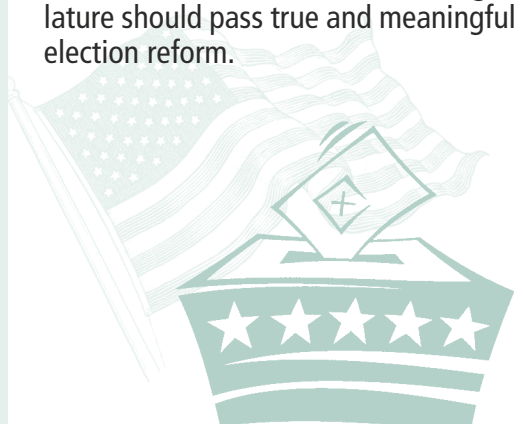
### Election Reform

By a large margin, many of you who responded to the district survey indicated you want us to make substantive changes to our election system, including requiring proof of citizenship when registering.

That's why I supported a comprehensive election reform bill this session that would have included reforms like showing **photo ID at the polls**, requiring counties to **reconcile the number of ballots** with the **number of lawful voters** and other measures to restore integrity to our elections. Unfortunately, that legislation did not pass.



Instead, the election bills we did pass were "election reform lite." For example, one bill requires people to show ID at the polls — but that ID can be a simple utility bill. Voters must "prove" they are eligible to vote by simply signing a statement saying so. And canvassing boards can still guess at voters' intent. These changes are just not enough to **restore voters' confidence** in our election system and prevent eligible voters from being disenfranchised. Next session the Legislature should pass true and meaningful election reform.



## New projects on the way

I am pleased to report that I helped secure funding for the following projects in our area.

- **Algona** – New traffic signal (\$100,000)
- **Highline Community College** – Marine Science and Technology Center (\$500,000)
- **Federal Way Boys' and Girls' Clubs** – Teen center (\$300,000)
- **Hylebos Wetlands** – Boardwalk (\$100,000)
- **Joe's Creek** – Salmon habitat restoration (\$856,000)
- **Dash Point Park** – New sewer lines and facilities (\$1.95 million)



## Thanks to pages and visitors!

Thanks to the following young people who I had the honor of sponsoring as pages this year:

- **Eric and Gary Belvin**, home school students, sons of Laura and Steve Belvin, Federal Way
- **Grace Su**, Charles Wright Academy, daughter of William Su and Ju-Hsun Chuang, Federal Way
- **Kelly Thomas**, Federal Way H.S., daughter of Dale Thomas, Federal Way
- **Johanna Christine McIntyre**, Todd Beamer H.S., daughter of Barbara and Jon McIntyre, Auburn

If your son or daughter would like to serve as a page in Olympia in the next legislative session, please call my office or visit the legislative page web site at <http://www1.leg.wa.gov/House/PageInternProgram/> and click on "Student Page Program."

Thanks, too, to the dozens of you who came to Olympia this year to say hello, get help with issues or lobby for your cause. Among others, we welcomed guests from the **Federal Way Latino Night School**, the **Klahanee Senior Center**, students from **Green Gables**, **Meredith Hills** and **Sherwood Forest elementary schools**, as well as other school groups who came to tour the Capitol. I encourage anyone who has the opportunity to come to Olympia next session and drop by for a visit.

